

Never one to hold Washington in high regard, the great American humorist Will Rogers is said to have been overjoyed after reading in a newspaper that Congress was deadlocked and could not act. He is reported to have exclaimed, "I think this is the greatest blessing that could befall this country." While there are times when I would agree with him, this is certainly not one of them.

The legislative logjam that has befallen Capitol Hill over extending the payroll tax cut for a year could have painful consequences for the American people. Yet, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid left Washington a week ago without bothering to consult with the House over the fate of an expiring payroll tax cut affecting some 160 million Americans come January 1. His irresponsible action has forced a halt in our efforts to pass a one-year extension of this tax relief.

One year ago, in an effort to provide workers with an extra lift in their paychecks, Congress agreed to a temporary two percent reduction in the payroll tax. While this tax relief is modest to be sure, its impact – about \$80 a month for the average worker – has been beneficial to many who are scraping by in this stubborn economy. Lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle have generally agreed that the tax relief should be extended for another year. Given that fact, it is deeply disappointing that Congress is seemingly deadlocked over what really should be a simple issue.

Two weeks ago, the House, in a bipartisan vote, passed a one-year extension of the payroll tax cut. Our legislation not only extended the tax relief for 12 months, but we authorized unemployment benefits for another 13 months. Furthermore, our bill addressed a Medicare funding dilemma that threatens seniors' access to their doctors.

To help pay for the one-year tax cut, the House bill would impose a pay freeze on Members of Congress and federal workers, take additional steps to reduce Welfare and Social Security benefits fraud, auction valuable communications spectrum and end unemployment and food stamp benefits for millionaires, to name a few. Disappointingly, the Senate refused to follow our lead, ignoring these steps to responsibly pay for the tax relief extension.

Four days after the House passed a balanced payroll tax cut extension bill, Senator Harry Reid gutted our bill – removing the offsetting spending reductions mentioned above – and simply extended the payroll tax cut, unemployment benefits and Medicare fix for a mere 60 days.

Much to the astonishment of the House, Senator Reid then packed his bags and bolted out of Washington for the year.

With two very different bills at Congress's doorstep, lawmakers are obligated to work together to reach an agreement on a final bill that will pass both the House and the Senate before January 1. This is the way Congress does its job, and while not perfect – as Will Rogers would have been quick to point out – it is the way legislation has been passed since the first Congress in 1789.

For those who don't believe an agreement can be reached, I would like to point out that the Senate bill, for all its shortcomings, did actually include a key House requirement that the president make a decision within 60 days over whether to allow construction of a vital oil pipeline from Canada to the United States. The pipeline is opposed by the Obama administration, which disagrees with the House, labor unions and a majority of Americans over the need to allow our country greater access to Canadian oil. The pipeline project would generate tens of thousands of new American jobs while also helping to reduce our dependence upon oil from foreign adversaries.

If we can agree on requiring the president to decide on the pipeline, surely the House and Senate can find a way to extend payroll tax relief, unemployment benefits and the Medicare fix for another 12 months. If not, Senator Reid will have chosen to play Scrooge just as millions of Americans look ahead to an uncertain new year.

Last week, House Speaker John Boehner appointed a conference committee to work with the Senate to forge a final bill. He has committed to keeping the House in session through the end of the year to finish this important work. If the Senate will join us, we will be happy to share the credit for reaching a bipartisan, bicameral resolution that even Will Rogers might have approved.

Welcome Home 1165th!

As I write this column, I am preparing my welcome home remarks to be delivered at the December 23 ceremony honoring the return of the men and women of the 1165th Military Police Company of Fairhope.

We are all proud of their service and join their families and friends in welcoming them home from Afghanistan in time for the holidays.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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